

An Essay on
Phytologia

Respectfully Submitted to
the Faculty of the
Homoeopathic Medical College
of Pennsylvania
on the

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by
Wm Ashmun Reed
of Pennsylvania.

Phytologia.

There are those who deem the study of Botany of but little importance to the Physician. They look upon it merely as an interesting or amusing study - fitted rather for the man of leisure, or at best for the student of nature. Forgetting the advantages already accruing to the Medical profession from its cultivation by but a few, they cannot see why the many, or all who enter the ranks of the profession are to be benefitted by it.

Fortunately, the founders of the Homoeopathic Medical College of Pennsylvania considered the cultivation of this science as necessary to the complete education of the Medical Student. They accordingly established a Chair of Botany, to fill which they have chosen an experienced and enthusiastic practical Botanist and Physician - whose teachings have already inspired his pupils at least with the belief that the science of Botany will become a faithful handmaid to the science of

Homoeopathy;

Let us consider but a few of the reasons why the Physician should seek an intimate acquaintance with this Science.

I. In our Materia Medica we find that three-fifths of the entire number of medicaments used are preparations from plants.

Now all will admit that it is necessary for the Homoeopathic Physician to be certain that the medicine which he administers is the same as that according to whose pathogenesis he is prescribing:

Without this certainty, he can never have an intelligent faith in his practice and his doubt is at the expense of his patients' health or life.

The Physicians of the Old School may content themselves with administering Red-Lead for Red-precipitate, dried Blood or Asphaltum for Moschus, a mixture of liquorice, mud and cow-dung for Opium, Resin for Guaiacum, the petals of Calendula or Carthamus tinctorius for Crocus and Bryonia root for Jalapa — Perhaps

the substitution may prove to be better for the patient - it is not likely that it should be worse.

But the Homoeopath, who looks to the symptomatic group of a disease, must have that drug whose pathogenesis offers the like group; and unless he is sure that he has this same drug he cannot effectively prescribe for his patient.

Now in what way will the science of Botany aid us here? It surely, will afford no assistance in the detection of a want of genuineness in those medicaments which are derived from the mineral and Animal Kingdoms; nor in those, which although vegetable substances, come to us in the various forms of gums, resins, tinctures and extracts - from abroad, the plants from which they are derived perhaps never coming before our sight.

But it is with reference to those plants which can and which ought to come under our own notice that an acquaintance with this science will become necessary.

The native plants of our own country are taking important places in our Materia Medica; and the same

jealousy that watches so closely our pathogeneses should also carefully scrutinize those substances from which the symptoms are professedly derived. An Old-School authority may give one plant the name of another and their Symptomen Codex remain uninjured for they have none. But the Homoeopath will not, it is to be hoped, call (for instance) the *Rhus Vernix* the *Rhus Radicans**. Should one be found to make this foolish blunder, perhaps, it would be well for his punishment to be, to rest for a few minutes in the shade of the one or to take an easy swing on the other -

Now the plants of our own country like all other plants can be properly determined only by their botanical distinctions; and the Physician who would seek every opportunity to prepare his own medicines, and this he should do, must have the aid of Botany if he would gather his medicinal plants with certainty. We say then, that a knowledge of this science is necessary to the Physician inasmuch as it is his duty to be free from doubt as to the genuineness of his medicines.

* Vide Dunglison's Med. Dict. article "*Rhus radicans*".

II. It becomes the duty of the follower of Hahnemann to institute provings of new substances. So it is necessary, when after having made his provings he would offer them to his brethren, that he should carefully and scientifically describe the substance proved. Now should this be a vegetable product how can that from which it is derived be accurately described without the Botanical language and classification? Pages descriptive of the plant may be written and the reader be yet uncertain what plant is meant, and the labor of the prover be lost - or what is worse, the provings, themselves valuable, be of no effect. Nor will it answer for the uninitiated to trust to a consultation of Botanical text-books to gain a proper description or the generic and specific names of the plant. In such a case the vulgar name is that which usually guides him in his search, and, as every Botanist knows, is that which is no guide at all.

A recent journal has given us some most valuable symptoms belonging to a certain well known plant of our gardens. But the contributor after ransacking his books

has christened his plant with the botanical name of another entirely different species. Perhaps by this time many Homoeopathic practitioners in different parts of our land have made tinctures of the plant whose botanical name was given, and have lost their faith in the contribution of the excellent and otherwise very learned Physician.

In this way much mischief may result if it be only from losing time by administering a wrong remedy.

Let persons remember that their aches and pains, their putrids and purges will all be of no avail if they cannot tell what it was that so afflicted them.

III. In the treatment of disease the observing practitioner often feels the want of some medicinal agent with the same general or major symptoms possessed by that which he may at the time be administering, but with different minor symptoms or "conditions". This want has already, in some instances, been supplied, but almost exclusively among the mineral medicines, while but few similarly close relationships have as yet been determined among

vegetable substances. Thus we have the *Mucurinus vivus*,
solubilis, *praecip. rub.* and *conv. subl.* interchanging with
each other, and in like manner the acetates of Copper and
Zinc with the pure Metals. While in the Vegetable Kingdom
we have the relationship of the *Rhus Toxicodendron*, *Rad-*
icans and *Vernix*, also the *Juglans Regia*, *Cinerea* and *Nigra*,
and besides these but a few.

The paucity of these relationships in our *Materia Medica*
may be rightly attributed to the want of method in se-
lecting substances for trial. A sort of odd mania has
led some provers to vie with each other in selecting
strange material for trial. We have thus obtained the
symptoms of the louse, the spider, the bed-bug, the skunk,
crab's eyes and of crabs entire; and we may expect to hear
of the pathogenesis of the Snapper, terrapin and lobster,
or perhaps of horse-hair or a cat's teeth or of a pig's tail.

It is conceded that from every substance medicinal prop-
erties may be eliminated. We might make a tritura-
tion of a piece of the roof of a house and would undoubt-
edly find some symptoms which would be of great use.

But why go so far for a proving? Why such hap-
hazard? If in our *Materia Medica* we find a
need for remedies of a particular character let us seek
for such with whatever aid is proffered us in our search.

Now it is not pretended that the science of Botany
in its present condition will conduct us to a plant
containing any particular qualities we may desire.
Perhaps had more Physicians devoted time to the
advancement of the science this object might already
have been partially gained. But, as it is, the genera
of the botanical arrangement will frequently point out
plants of like qualities associated together. Thus
we see the genus *Ranunculus* offers us the *Bulbosus*,
the *Scleratus*, the *Acris* and the *Flammula*—

Solanum points to its *Dulcamara*, *Nigrum*, *Lycopersi-
con* and *Mammosum*. The *Lobelia inflata* has sug-
gested the *Cardinalis*. But, perhaps of all, the *Rhus*
affords the best example. This genus gives us the *Tox-
icodendron*, the *Radicans* and the *Vernix*, all three
of which (for instance) produce a *Vesicular erysipelas*.

but with separate and characteristic accompanying symptoms.

If then there be need for a systematic selection of substances for provings, and if the botanical arrangement of plants will facilitate the search for vegetable substances of desired qualities, surely it becomes the Homoeopath to make himself acquainted with the Botanical Science.

IV. In the Vegetable kingdom, as in the other kingdoms of Nature the proofs of design are abundant. From all the works of the Creation we infer the Benevolence of the Creator, and by His revelation we are made sure of it. Now as God has strewn the earth with an innumerable variety of plants with some design, and as we believe He has done this in accordance with His benevolence, we cannot gain a knowledge of what design or of what benevolence has been displayed, unless we find out to what uses they have been ordained.

Man thanks the Creator for the bread he eats. We offer up our thanksgivings for bountiful harvests and for the

various fruits of the land. In all this we recognize the design and benevolence of God as manifested in a certain class of plants, to be that they should minister to the sustenance and enjoyment of Man.

But we find that many - very many plants are capable of producing deviations from health when partaken of by persons of sane bodies, and of curing such deviations from health in those suffering disease. We may reasonably infer that such plants were designed in the benevolence of the Creator for the curing of disease. And if so many have been found to have these qualities, and as we cannot think that the myriads of plants yet untried are without some office, is it not at least probable - highly probable that throughout the Vegetable Creation there lie hidden many valuable healing agents waiting only the persevering search of the Medical Botanist to be made effectual in the subduing of disease, many forms of which are now the terror of the Physician because he is yet without their specific remedy.

Does it not then become the earnest Physician to study

well this department of God's creation, to advance the Science whose object it is, but which yet in vain endeavors to comprehend it, and to hasten by his labors the time when plants shall not be sought by an artificial, but by a natural method deduced from their well defined qualities?

Surely our Aconite, our Belladonna, our Pulsatilla and the many other well tried and faithful vegetable medicines invite us to search for their relatives in their kingdom. To do this we must have a chart and a guide, and these are the Science of Botany and the practical Botanist.

V. We will only hint at the illustrations and suggestions to be derived from Vegetable Physiology so useful in our analogical study of Human Physiology.

Now will we stop to show how a knowledge of the plants in our neighborhoods may assist us in making an early diagnosis in certain cases of poisoning.

But, perhaps, we may pleasantly conclude by considering the study aside from its really scientific usefulness, as a proper and wise, as well as a most delightful recreation from the

severer studies and the onerous duties of the profession.
It would be a healthful change for the Physician to
turn away at times from the unrightly, the deformed and
the loathesome to rest his eyes on the beautiful, the perfect,
and the inviting, conscious that while seeking his enjoyment
he adds to that which at length will assist him in
the healing of the sick. Without this consciousness
the Physician has no right to engage in any pursuit,
for as the Minister spends his life in battling with the
diseases of the soul - so must the Physician devote his
life to battling with the diseases of the Body.